

Nada Zečević

Medieval Studies in Serbia 1993-2008

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The center of medieval research in Serbia is in Belgrade. The core institutions of this center, namely the Institute of Byzantine Studies, the medieval section of the Institute of History, and the medieval section of the Institute of Balkan Studies, operate under the auspices of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts in Belgrade. This core is associated in a variety of projects with a number of other research and educational institutions in Serbia, the most important among them located at the Faculty of Philosophy of Belgrade University: the medieval department, the Byzantine seminar of the History Department, the Department of Classical Languages, and the seminars of the departments of archaeology and art history.¹ This circle also comprises the Departments of Archaeology, Medieval History and Numismatics at the National Museum in Belgrade and the Department of Archaeography of the National Library in Belgrade. Similarly structured, although considerably smaller in terms of number of permanently employed researchers, are the centers in Novi Sad² (Újvidék) and Niš, with a network of national museums and other cultural institutions across Serbian province.³ Apart from in these centers, Serbian medievalists are closely involved in research and teaching activities at the centers in the Serbian entity of the

¹ The departments for medieval Serbian language at the Faculty of Philology and the Faculty of Orthodox (Christian) Theology of Belgrade also belong to this circle even though the latter institution tends to act independently from the lay scholarly mainstream.

² Medieval research in Novi Sad has been conducted by the Matica Srpska/departments of Philosophy and Philology at the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad. Recently, some the scholars of this center have broken with the traditional concepts of the Serbian medievalist mainstream by actively participating in the Center for Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary Studies and research at the University of Novi Sad, see works on medieval Serbian literature, manuscripts and gender examinations by Svetlana Tomin, *Vladika Maksim Branković* [Archbishop Maxim Branković] (Novi Sad: Platoneum, 2007) and eadem, *Knjigoljubive žene srpskog srednjeg veka* [Book-loving women of the Serbian Middle Ages] (Novi Sad: Akademska knjiga, 2007).

³ The National Museum of Čačak, the National Museum of Leskovac, the National Museum of Kruševac, the Historical Archive in Valjevo, the Historical Institute in Banja Luka. To this circle one should (technically) add the one at the Serbian-funded University of Priština, currently located in Kosovska Mitrovica, where a few of its researchers focus on local and eastern Adriatic issues (Božidar Zarković, Branislav Milutinović, Dragi Maliković). However, this circle has remained largely insignificant in relation to the general Serbian context due to its failure to pursue a systematic research policy (especially apparent after the faculty's dislocation from Priština following the NATO bombing in 1999) and a series of university corruption scandals that have taken place in post-Milošević Serbia.

Bosnian Federation (Republika Srpska), namely at the Faculties of Philosophy in Eastern Sarajevo and Banja Luka,⁴ while some of them also direct their research towards Montenegro.⁵

As a logical outcome of its predominantly Byzantine medieval past, Serbian medieval researchers cooperate with a number of international institutions of Byzantine studies, most significantly with the Institute of Byzantine Research and the Greek Academy in Athens, the Bulgarian, Macedonian, and Russian Academies of Science, as well as Dunbarton Oaks, German Byzantinists, and Sorbonne-Paris IV. The key professional association of Serbian medievalists is *Društvo istoričara Srbije* (Society of the Historians of Serbia), while the Byzantinists are members of the International Association of Byzantinists (A.I.E.B). Some medievalists actively participate in *Društvo prijatelja Svete Gore* (The Society of Friends of Mount Athos).

The theoretical grounds on which Serbian medieval research rests, as well as its methodology, have not changed greatly since the beginning of the twentieth century and Serbian medieval scholars of the twenty-first century boast of their traditional approach. The research process builds on positivistic methods of establishing “true” facts from the written sources, a strict, impersonal scholarly approach *sine ira et studio*, with the results most commonly presented in an inductive and axiomatic manner, using an impersonal tone and the passive voice.

In choosing their subjects, Serbian medievalists are renowned for concentrating on Slavic-Serbian-Byzantine relations and following these reflections on a local and national level. Another of specific feature is special attention to the critical analysis and publication of written sources, which has resulted in several large projects in past years. One of them is the *Stari srpski arhiv* (SSA), a periodical started in 2002 by Rade Mihaljčić that aims to collect, (re)publish, and develop the *apparatus criticus* for all documents that pertain to Serbian history. In some respects, the SSA is conceived of as a prototype of the Serbian *diplomatarium*,⁶ a project that has been pending for decades. The most important feature of this periodical is that,

⁴ To this circle one should add a group of ex-patriot medievalists, among them: Nenad Fejić of the la Guyane; Dušan Korać USA, Ida Tot, of Wolfson College, Oxford; Ivana Jevtić, Paris; Srdjan Rajković (d.) of UCLA; Zaga Gavrilović (d.) of the University of Birmingham.

⁵ Sima Ćirković, “Osobnosti istoriografije o srednjeevropskom periodu Crne Gore” [Features of the Historiography of the Medieval Period in Montenegro] *Crna Gora kao polje istraživanja* [Montenegro as a Field of research] 3 (1999): 19–26.

⁶ According to the original conception, the first part of the Serbian *Diplomatarium* would cover the period until the end of King Milutin’s rule (1321), when the SSA would begin.

after many decades of unspecified and varying editorial practice, it has introduced standard criteria requiring special attention to the methodology of documentary research.⁷ Apart from the SSA, several other documentary publications have appeared, mainly archival materials from Dubrovnik and Kotor, as well as other sources for the relations of the medieval Serbs with their western neighbors, or social and economic history.⁸

The Serbian medieval mainstream is still largely reluctant to adopt the concept of interdisciplinarity, and, thus, is still structured upon a strict division of disciplines with history as the dominant field. Within this field, Serbian historians have focused on political events or epochs, administration and titles, chronology and key “participants” (a prosopographical approach for individuals, a genealogical approach for families),⁹ or some fragmentary details of the local context.¹⁰ The flagrant misuse of Serbian medieval history – with the 1389 battle at Kosovo Field as its key theme – by the hard-line nationalist regime of Slobodan Milošević (as a “scholarly justification” for Serbian involvement in the western Balkan wars of the 1990s) is still taboo and attempts to analyze its causes and instances critically

⁷ Over the years, the criteria for the edition of medieval documents have greatly varied depending on the standards of each particular publication. Those established by the SSA require: a short history of the document, earlier editions, the text in the original language, its translation into Serbian, a description of its diplomatic features, a commentary on institutions, key persons, topography, and a digital or photographic image of the document.

⁸ Andrija Veselinović, *Dubrovačko Malo vijeće o Srbiji 1415–1460* [The Minor Council of Dubrovnik on Serbia 1415–1460] (Belgrade: Istorijski institut SANU, 1997); CD edition of *Statuta et leges civitatis Cathari* [Kotor–Belgrade: Historical Archive of Kotor–Mathematical Institute Belgrade, 1997–1999]; Miloš Blagojević, *Zemljoradnički zakon* [Agrarian Law] (Belgrade: SANU, 2007).

⁹ E.g., Sanja Mešanović, *Jovan VII Paleolog* [John VII Palaiologos] (Belgrade: Vizantološki institut [hereafter: VI], 1996); Srdjan Pirivatrić, *Samuilova država* [Samuil’s State] (Belgrade: VI, 1997); Marica Malović, “Prilog istoriji Drobnjaka u srednjem veku,” [A Contribution to the History of the Drobniak Kindred] *Glasnik Zavičajnog muzeja* 1 (1999): 145–158; Ruža Čuk(d.), “Dubrovačka porodica Miljenović u srednjem veku,” [The Ragusan Miljenović Family in the Middle Ages] *Zbornik za istoriju Bosne i Hercegovine* 3 (2002); Vlada Stanković, *Carigradski patrijarsi i carevi makedonske dinastije* [Patriarchs and Emperors of the Macedonian dynasty] (Belgrade: Institute of Byzantine Studies, 2003); Zorica Djoković, “Stanovništvo Istočne Makedonije u prvoj polovini XIV veka [The Population of Eastern Macedonia in the First Half of the Fourteenth Century],” *Zbornik radova vizantološkog instituta* (hereafter: ZRVI) 40 (2003): 97–244; Miloš Blagojević, “Veliki knez i zemaljski knez,” [Great Knez and Land Knez] ZRVI 41 (2004): 293–318; Vlada Stanković, *Komnini u Carigradu (1057–1185): evolucija jedne carske porodice* (The Komnenoi in Constantinople: an evolution of an imperial family) (Belgrade: Institute of Byzantine Studies, 2006).

¹⁰ E.g., Djuro Tošić, “Primjer bračne bigamije *more bosignanorum et patarinorum*,” [An Example of Conjugal Bigamy *more bosinanorum et patarinorum*], *Miscellanea /Mešovita građa* 22 (2004): 123–127.

have ended in a strong public bias against the authors.¹¹ Tacitly avoiding this debate, the medieval mainstream of post-Milošević Serbia (from 2000 onwards) has focused on fifteenth-century or post-Byzantine topics,¹² occasionally returning to some previous epochs.¹³ A somewhat wider interest has been shown by the Belgrade Byzantinists in topics that extend beyond the national borders or the commonly researched chronological pattern noted above.¹⁴ In tune with the formal declaration of the post-Milošević Serbia to favor membership in the European Union, several monographs which review the medieval Serbs and their history in a broader European context have been issued during the past nine years.¹⁵ Recently, some researchers have expressed a noteworthy interest in the issues of social phenomenology, historical anthropology, ethnography, and hagiography,¹⁶

¹¹ Ivan Djurić(d.), *Istorija: pribežište ili putokaz* [History: A Shelter or a Guide] (first ed. Sarajevo: Prosveta, 1990; Kragujevac: Civic, 1999); Radivoj Radić: *Srbi pre Adama i posle njega, Istorija jedne zloupotrebe: Slovo protiv "novoromantičara"* [The Serbs before Adam and after Him: A History of a Misuse – A Word against "Neo-Romanticists"] (Belgrade: Stubovi kulture, 2005, second revised edition). Cf. Radić's debate with his oponents in the magazine *Nin* in 2006–2007.

¹² Momčilo Spremić, *Despot Djuradj Branković i njegovo doba* [Despot George Branković and his Epoch] (Belgrade: Srpska književna zadruga, first edition 1994; second edition 1999); Jovanka Kalić, *Srbi u poznom srednjem veku* [The Serbs in the Late Middle Ages] (Belgrade: SANU, Balkanološki institut, 1994).

¹³ Sima Ćirković and Božidar Ferjančić(d.), *Stefan Dušan, kralj i car 1331–1355* [Stephan Dushan, King and Emperor 1331–1355] (Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, 2005). The freedom to publish, improved after 2000, brought a revival of some old literature and topics, e. g., reprinting of the crucial works by K. Jireček, *Istorija Srba* [The History of the Serbs], 2 vols. (Belgrade: Beoknjiga, 2006), or Ivan Djurić's, *Sumrak Vizantije* (The Twilight of Byzantium) (Belgrade: SANU, 1984 first edition; third edition Belgrade: Prosveta, 2008). For a re-examination of pre-fifteenth century topics, see the collected works of the international conference *Stefan Nemanja–Sveti Simeon Mirotočivi – istorija i predanje* [Stephan Nemanja – Saint Simeon Mirotočivi – History and Myth] (Belgrade–Novi Pazar 1996, reprinted Belgrade: SANU, 2000); International Conference (1998) *Osam vekova Hilandara* [Eight centuries of Hilandar], ed. Vojislav Korać (Belgrade: SANU, 2000); *Kralj Vladislav i Srbija XIII veka: naučni skup 15.–16. novembra 2000* [King Vladislav and Serbia in the Thirteenth Century: Symposium, 15 –16 November 2000] (Belgrade: Istorijski institut, 2003).

¹⁴ Radivoj Radić, *Vreme Jovana V Paleologa* [The Epoch of John V Palaiologos] (Belgrade: Vizantološki institut, 1993); Sima Ćirković, *Rabotnici, vojnici, duhovnici: društva srednjevekovnog Balkana* [Laborers, Soldiers and Spirituals: The Societies of the Medieval Balkans] (Belgrade: Equilibrium, 1997); Nada Zečević, *Vizantija i Goti na Balkanu u IV i V veku* [Byzantium and the Goths in the Balkans in the Fourth and Fifth centuries] (Belgrade: Vizantološki institut, 2002).

¹⁵ Jovanka Kalić, *Evropa i Srbi: srednji vek* [Europe and the Serbs: The Middle Ages] (Belgrade: Historical Institute, 2006) and Sima Ćirković, *The Serbs (The Peoples of Europe)* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 7–111.

¹⁶ Smilja Marjanović-Dušanić, *Vladarska ideologija Nemanjića* [The Ruling Ideology of the Nemanjić dynasty] (Belgrade: Clio–SKZ, 1997); Radivoj Radić, *Strah u poznoj Vizantiji* [Fear in the Late Byzantine Period 1180–1453], 2 vols., (Belgrade: Stubovi kulture, 2000); Jelena Mrgić-Radojčić, *Donji Kraji – krajina srednjevekovne Bosne* [Donji Kraji–the Frontier of Medieval Bosnia] (Belgrade–Banja Luka:

while work on the popularisation of history seems to have diverged from the populism of the 1990s.¹⁷

Just as in history, Serbo-Byzantine interactions are also the dominant topic among art historians. During the past 15 years, researchers have mostly concentrated on Byzantine fresco paintings illustrating sacral topics in fifteenth-century Serbia,¹⁸ the phenomenon of patronage, prosopography of artists and chronologies of their works, and the socio-political conditions of their activities.¹⁹ The end of the 1990s brought an extended overview of architecture in the Byzantine world.²⁰ Throughout the 1990s, careful systematization and presentation of the Serbian art of Kosovo (where some sites are under the protection of UNESCO) have been among the top priorities in this field.²¹ The importance of this activity became especially significant after the NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999 and the subsequent destruction of monuments and other signs of Serbian collective memory in the region of Kosovo and Metohija by the Albanians who govern the region under international supervision.²² Another group of art historians, namely, those associated with the

Filozofski fakultet, 2002); *Privatni život u srednjevekovnoj Srbiji* [Private Life in Medieval Bosnia], ed. Smilja Marjanović–Dušanić and Danica Popović (Belgrade: Clio, 2004); Djordje Bubalo, *Srpski nomici* [Serbian Notary Acts] (Belgrade: VI, 2004); Stanoje Bojanin, *Zabave i svetkovine u srednjevekovnoj Srbiji: od kraja XII do kraja XV veka* [Entertainment and Celebrations in Medieval Serbia] (Belgrade: Istorijski institut–Službeni glasnik, 2005); Danica Popović, *Pod okriljem svetosti: kult svetovnih vladara i relikvija srednjeg veka* [Under the Mantle of Holiness: The Cult of Medieval Rulers and Relics of the Middle Ages] (Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies, 2006). The reception of Antiquity in medieval Serbia was examined at the Third Yugoslav Conference of Byzantinists in Kruševac, 2000.

¹⁷ Radivoj Radić, *Vizantija, purpur i pergament* [Byzantium, Purple and Parchment] (Beograd: Evoluta, 2006); idem., *Carigrad, priče sa Bosfora* [Constantinople, Stories from the Bosphorus] (Beograd: : Evoluta, 2007). Sima Ćirković, *Srbi među Evropskim narodima* [The Serbs among the European Peoples] (Belgrade: Equilibrium, 2005). Cf. articles on medieval history in *Politikin Zabavnik* (a weekly journal especially popular among the school children of ex-Yugoslavia), or translation and editions of books for school children by the Plato and Kreativna radionica publishing houses.

¹⁸ Zaga Gavrilović(d.), *Studies in Byzantine and Serbian Medieval Art* (London: Pindar, 2001). Slobodan Ćurčić, see the bibliography at <http://www.princeton.edu/artandarchaeology/faculty/curcic/curciccv.pdf>.

¹⁹ Čedomila Marinković, *Slika podignute crkve: predstave arhitekture u ktiorskim portretima u srpskoj i vizantijskoj umetnosti* [Image of an Elevated Church: The Image of Architecture on the Portraits of the Patrons in Serbian and Byzantine Art] (Belgrade: Princip Bonart Press, 2007).

²⁰ Vojislav Korać and Marica Šuput, *Arhitektura vizantijskog sveta* [The Architecture of the Byzantine World] (Belgrade: Narodna knjiga, 1998).

²¹ Gojko Subotić, *The Sacred Land: The Art of Kosovo* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1998), and other editions in translation.

²² Official Serbian statistics claim the destruction of more than 200 Serbian Orthodox sacral buildings (churches and monasteries) or graveyards and other monuments, most of which date back to the Middle Ages.

Institute of the Balkan Studies in Belgrade, systematically research the art works of Kotor (Montenegro) from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries. Serbian art historians (in cooperation with Classical and medieval philologists) have also taken the lead in several projects related to inscriptions. Currently, a systematic treatment of twelfth- and thirteenth-century inscriptions, conducted by the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, has been almost finalized, with a focus on the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries to come in the near future. Following a great fire in the key Serbian monastery of Hilandar on Mount Athos in 2004, a group of Serbian art historians and restorers is cooperating with a Greek team from the Center for the Protection of Sacred Heritage (Thessaloniki) on its restoration.

The activities of Serbian literary historians in the past 15 years have mainly concentrated various editions of medieval narratives in the Serbian language and areopagitic manuscripts in Serbian medieval theology. In addition, some researchers of this group have engaged in documentary edition projects (notably, Tatjana Subotin-Golubović), dealing at the same time with particular issues of authorship, paleography, philigranology, etc.²³

Largely depending on the funds available, archaeological research in Serbia has been conducted with a changing intensity. In the past few years, the Institute of Archaeology in Belgrade has extensively investigated the Belgrade fortress, as well as the early medieval sites of Vrsenice, Margum, and Gamzigrad (Romuliana). In the Serbian interior, dynastic graves of the High Middle Ages and the monasteries where these graves are located have caught the special attention of archaeologists, as well as the region of Ras, which represents the core of Nemanjić dynastic power.²⁴ At the same time, a group of archaeologists (Vladislav Popović [d.], Mihailo Milinković) have focused on the early medieval periods (fourth to seventh century) (Sirmium, Mount Jelica), while the excavations conducted by the *Zavod za zaštitu spomenika*

²³ E.g., Djordje Trifunović, *Stara srpska književnost: osnove* [Ancient Serbian Literature: The Basics] (Belgrade: F. Višnjić, 1994); R. Stanković, *Rukopisne knjige Muzeja srpske pravoslavne crkve u Beogradu* [Manuscript Books of the Museum of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Belgrade]. *Vodeni znaci i datiranje* [Watermarks and Chronology], in *Opis južnoslovenskih ćirilskih rukopisa* [Description of South Slavic Manuscripts], vol. 5 (Belgrade: Narodna biblioteka Srbije, 2003); Irena Špadijer, "Pisar ktitorskog natpisa sv. Save u Studenici" [The Scribe of the Patron Inscription of St. Sabbas in Studenica], *ZRVI* 43 (2006): 517–521.

²⁴ Petar Petrović, Jelena Erdeljan, and Marko Popović, *Srednjevekovni nadgrobni spomenici u oblasti Rasa* [Medieval Grave monuments in the Region of Ras] (Belgrade: Arheološki institut, 1996); Marko Popović, *Tvrđjava Ras* [The Fortress of Ras] (Belgrade: Arheološki institut, 2005). For rare anthropological investigations, see S. Reljanović, M. Djurić-Srejić, al., "Morfologija zuba na skeletnim ostacima iz nekropole stara Torina," [Morphology of Teeth on Skeletons from the Necropolis of Old Torina] *Glasnik Antropološkog društva Srbije* 35 (1999–2000): 135–142.

kulture (Agency for the Protection of Cultural Monuments) (in 2006) at the monastery of Manasija have reopened a debate on the burial place of Despot Stefan Lazarević. Since 2000, scholars have shown increased interest in Byzantine imports in Serbia as well as Serbian medieval coinage, precious metals and metalurgy.²⁵

In 1997, a pan-Balkan network initiative launched a non-profit and non-governmental publishing, cultural and educational on-line project: Rastko, the internet Library of Serbian Culture. The main activities of this project relate to electronic publishing in Serbian on Balkan arts and humanities. The project has been organized across several regional sections: Belgrade (the central project), and projects that relate to Serbian links with Romania, Montenegro, Kosovo and Metohija, Boka Kotorska, Hungary, etc. The centers develop projects and activities through local academic, cultural, media NGOs and individuals, including strong co-operation with ethnic minority centers.

In 2004, a group of Serbian ethno-musicians started the Centre for early Music “Renesans” in Belgrade. This circle gathers mostly the graduates of the Department of Early Music of the Secondary School “Josip Slavenski” in Belgrade and the founders of the famous “Ensemble Renaissance” (founded in 1969). the group is focused on the research, interpretation and education of medieval, renaissance and baroque music traditions. In 2005, the Centre founded the early music ensemble “Flauto Dolce” which performs the music with special focus on the Serbian and Byzantine medieval context.²⁶

²⁵ Sergije Dimitrijević, *Problemi srpske srednjevekovne numizmatike* [Problems of Serbian Medieval Numismatics] (Belgrade: Srpsko numizmatičko društvo, 2006); B. Nikolić et al., *Srebro u srednjevekovnoj Srbiji* [Silver in Medieval Serbia] (Belgrade: Tehnika, 2006).

²⁶ <http://www.rastko.org.yu/>; http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l9BHR1qaZl0&feature=PlayList&p=DEC630F1ABD6119C&playnext=1&playnext_from=PL&index=20